

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Little Snake Field Office
455 Emerson St.
Craig, CO 81625**

DECISION RECORD

**Sand Wash Basin Wild Horse Herd Management Area
Bait/Water Trapping Gather/Population Control
DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2016-0023-EA**

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Little Snake Field Office (LSFO) is proposing to gather, via bait/water trapping methodology, the majority of the horses within the Sand Wash HMA and remove up to 50 wild horses from the Sand Wash Herd Management Area (HMA). Concurrent with this action, it is further proposed to continue a long term fertility control program using the approved fertility control drug porcine zona pellucia (PZP). PZP will be administered to approximately 80% of the adult mares inhabiting the Sand Wash HMA using bait trapping methodology in October of 2016. The horses proposed for removal would be placed into the adoption program with the Great Escape Mustang Sanctuary (GEMS).

The BLM has reviewed the information currently available and has determined that excess wild horses are present within the HMA and that an overpopulation exists and that the gather and fertility control program are necessary to manage animals in accordance with the authority provided in Section 1333 (b) (2) of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (WFRHBA) of 1971, as amended, and to comply with 43 CFR 4710.4. The Environmental Assessment DOI-BLM-CO-N010-2016-0023-EA considered 8 alternatives, three of which were analyzed in detail. This detailed analysis discloses the potential environmental impacts associated with Alternative A, the Proposed Action, a bait/water trap operation with application of a fertility control program and removal of up to 50 horses; Alternative B, a bait/water trap fertility control program, with no removal and Alternative C, No Action.

AUTHORITIES

The proposed gather and removal of up to 50 excess wild horses within the Sand Wash HMA and the application of a fertility control program using PZP, is in compliance with Public Law 92-125, the WFRHBA as amended; the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA); and Public Law 95-514, the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (PRIA), which requires the BLM to protect, manage and control wild horse (or burro) populations on public lands.

DECISION

Based upon my review of the analysis in the EA, it is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, Alternative A, to gather and remove up to 50 excess wild horses from within the Sand Wash HMA and to continue a fertility control program using PZP, as described in Alternative A of the EA, including the utilization of all of the management actions and requirements as described in Section 2.2 along with the Standard Operating Procedures listed in Appendix C and D of the EA.

This decision is in conformance with and will best implement the land use planning decisions as documented in the Little Snake Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (October 2011), as amended by the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (September 2015).

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT SELECTED

In addition to the selected alternative, the EA evaluated and analyzed two other alternatives:

Alternative B – Fertility Control Management with Bait Trapping Assistance and No Removals: All actions would be the same as described under the Proposed Action; however no wild horses would be removed from the range, handled at off range corrals (ORCs), and placed at the GEMS or in off range pens (ORPs). Therefore, there would be no further handling of animals after the PZP vaccine is administered.

Alternative C - No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, no bait trapping gather, population growth suppression action (PZP) or wild horse removals would take place. The population of the wild horses in the Sand Wash Basin HMA would continue to grow at the national average rate of increase seen in the majority of HMAs of 20-25% per year. Nationally, there is a shortage of both off range corrals and off range pasture space for wild horses that have been removed from the range. Until adequate holding space becomes available, removals are not being authorized. The LSFO would lose this opportunity to remove up to 50 wild horses and place them with GEMS and it is unknown when space would become available in the national system.

The EA also lists five additional alternatives that were considered by the BLM but were eliminated from detailed analysis. The rationale for not analyzing these alternatives is provided in the EA on pages 18 and 19.

RATIONALE

The finding to select Alternative A, the Proposed Action, is based on the following rationale:

1. This decision is based on a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) dated September 20, 2016. This decision is in accordance with the policy found in 43 CFR Part 4700 and the WFRHBA.
2. This decision is in conformance with the Little Snake RMP/ROD dated October 2011 as amended by the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment, dated September 2015.

3. Alternative A best meets the Purpose and Need to address an over population of wild horses. While not meeting the appropriate management level (AML), this alternative with the fertility control program will make progress towards establishing and maintaining a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship within the HMA in accordance with the WFRHBA of 1971, and to manage wild horses within the area designated for long-term wild horse management.
4. Upon my analysis of the data contained within the EA, the current wild horse population is over-utilizing key vegetative species and continuous season long grazing is creating areas where plant communities are transitioning from desired plant communities to less desirable plant communities. This over utilization was most recently documented by the BLM in the 2014 Wild Horse Utilization Report, included in the EA as Appendix A. The excess wild horse population jeopardizes the BLM's ability to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance for all plant and animal species in balance with other multiple resource uses. Implementation of Alternative A provides the BLM with the best opportunity to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on these public lands.

After careful consideration of all the aforementioned information and relevant factors, I have determined that an overpopulation of wild horses exists and that action is necessary to protect land resources (upland vegetation and riparian plant communities, watershed function, habitat quality for other animal populations, along with threatened, endangered, and sensitive plant and animal species), and the continued multiple use management of the public lands. This action is necessary to ensure conformance with the applicable land use planning decisions. I have carefully reviewed all the available information and determined that gathering and removing of excess wild horses from the Sand Wash HMA is necessary in order to maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple use relationship in the area.

Based on this determination, it is my decision to implement a bait/water trap gather and fertility control program within the Sand Wash HMA on approximately October 20, 2016. The action is necessary to comply with 43 CFR 4710.1 and 43 CFR 4720.1.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The initiation of this proposed action was posted on the ePlanning website on March 23, 2016;

<https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/projectSummary.do?methodName=renderDefaultProjectSummary&projectId=59798>.

A press release was issued on July 25, 2016 in the Steamboat Pilot & Today and the Craig Daily Press informing the public about the availability of the EA on ePlanning and the opening of the comment period.

4,089 comment letters/emails were received from individuals, organizations and agencies during the 30 day comment period. The majority of these, approximately 4,025, were form letters. Comments received after September 6, 2016, were not considered. All comment letters were reviewed and resulted in approximately 45 unique substantive comments. Substantive

comments were utilized to finalize the EA as appropriate. BLM's responses to the comments received are identified in **Appendix B** of the EA.

PLAN CONSISTENCY

Based on information in the EA, the project record, and recommendation from BLM specialists, I conclude that this decision is consistent with the Little Snake Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (LSFO RMP/ROD October 2011) as amended by the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment and Record of Decision, September 2015; the Endangered Species Act; the native American Religious Freedom Act; other cultural resource management laws and regulations; Executive Order 12898 regarding Environmental Justice; and Executive Order 13007 regarding the action will not limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

This decision is effective upon the date of the decision or approval by the authorized officer, 43 CFR 4770.3(c). Under regulations addressed in 43 CFR Part 4, any party adversely affected has the right to appeal this decision. Within 30 days of the decision, a Notice of Appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at the Little Snake Field Office, 455 Emerson Street, Craig, CO 81625 with a copy sent to the Office of the Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, 755 Parfet St., Suite 151, Lakewood CO 80215. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Department of the Interior, Board of Land Appeals, 801 North Quincy St., MS300-QC, Arlington, VA 22203, within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer. If a person filing a notice of appeal wishes to seek a stay of the decision, the petition for stay must accompany the notice of appeal and be sent to the Interior Board of Land Appeals at the address above, as well as to the Little Snake Field Office and the Office of the Regional Solicitor, as provided in 43 CFR 4.21.

Contact Person:

For additional information concerning this decision, contact: the BLM NW Colorado District Wild Horse and Burro Specialist, Northwest Colorado District, 2815 H Road, Grand Junction, Colorado 81506, phone number (970) 244-3084.

APPROVAL

The Sand Wash Basin Wild Horse Herd Management Area Bait/Water Trapping Gather and Population Control is approved for implementation beginning on or after October 21, 2016. Implementation of the gather to remove excess wild horses from the Sand Wash HMA on/after this date is in accordance with the authority provided in Title 43 CFR 4770.3(c), which states in part; "decisions...shall be effective upon issuance or on a date established in the decision" when removal of excess animals is necessary to ensure and maintain a thriving natural ecological balance and multiple-use relationship and compliance with land use planning decisions.



Bruce Sillitoe
Field Manager

21 Sept. 2016
Date